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JAPAN'S CRUSADE ON THE USE OF OPIUM IN FORMOSA.

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IN the assembling at Shanghai of a Congress, international in its scope, whose aim will be to devise measures for regulating the use, but more especially for checking the abuse, of opium in any form or manner, there is promise of the betterment of conditions in general, but to none, unless it be to the Empire of China, will the work of the Congress be of greater service than to Japan's comparatively new possession, the Island of Formosa.

Though in China Imperial edicts have been repeatedly issued abolishing the opium trade and ordering officials to abstain and to induce others to abstain from its use, they have availed practically nothing. Great Britain is the chief importer of the drug in China, but has given assurance that if China is now in real earnest in the purpose to abolish its use, she will discontinue the trade.

Japan, Formosa, the Philippines, the United States and all other countries having political or commercial interests in China are more or less interested.

In the United States alone, according to the best authentic statistics and the assertions of the conservatives in positions to know, while but 100,000 pounds of opium can be used for medicinal purposes, 500,000 pounds are imported ostensibly for this purpose and an additional 150,000 pounds for smoking. And, further, seventy-five per cent. of the opium brought to this country is put to illicit use.

However, China is the nation most concerned, since it is there that the drug is in universal use and its sale, practically unrestricted, is producing untold havoc to the state, morally, industrially and commercially.

Just what general changes such a Congress will bring about, it is not easy to foretell; but whatever reform such a move creates will be gladly welcomed by none more warmly than by Japan, since the habit of an indiscriminate consumption of this most potent drug can serve for nothing but ill among the natives of Formosa, and thus frustrate the benign influence she so earnestly hopes to exert upon the life of that island. So far as "Japan proper" is concerned, no great benefit can be derived from a closer control of the drug, for the Japanese Government has ever strictly adhered to an absolute prohibition of its sale. Not so, however, in Formosa, because there the conditions are materially different. In "Japan proper" and among the Japanese in Formosa, the tendency towards indulgence in opium is very meagre, and is growing less as new ideas and reforms gradually penetrate into the remoter districts. In Formosa, the population is practically of Chinese origin. As the consequence of the cession of the island by the Chinese Government to Japan, by virtue of the Shimonoseki Peace Treaty in 1895, the inhabitants, by their own option, became naturalized as Japanese subjects. Conditions abound in the island which render the use of opium a menace to all who reside there, and if not controlled bid fair to jeopardize the entire future of the new possession.

Formosa is the southernmost island ceded to Japan by China after the Chino-Japanese conflict of 1894-5. Its area is 14,978 square miles, and, according to statistics of date December 31st, 1907, it has a population of 3,193,708, of which 2,999,214 are of Chinese origin.

Among this great bulk of Chinese population the smoking of opium is universal. The habit is by no means, as is popularly assumed, confined to the male element, for the women are also quite as much given to its indulgence. Its use is an integral part of their lives, engrafted as it is upon their native customs as prominently as are the wearing of the cue and the binding of their feet—two characteristics which identify them as a people separate and apart from any other nation of the globe.

Nor is this most deplorable habit one that prevails solely among those in the lower walks of life. Such classes use it for the comfort to be derived from its unique physiological effect, while the well-to-do and the rich indulge in it because it is a time-honored feature of their social life.

As is well known, the intemperate use of this drug is a menace to the individual, morally, physically and socially, as well as, sooner or later, mentally. These facts, then, suggest a most pertinent question: Why is its use in Formosa not prohibited or at least curtailed? The answer is that its use is being both gradually prohibited and curtailed. Another question arises: Why does not Japan enforce immediate and absolute prohibition? Again the answer is that no power of law, either human or divine, could effectually enforce such a prohibition at once. Besides, to endeavor to do so would be unscientific, regard being had to the natives from a humane standpoint, and quite futile as a means for promoting the advancement of the welfare of both State and people.

Even were not such considerations as these almost unsurmountable barriers to a sudden and absolute prohibition, there is one other which is paramount, *viz.*, the fact that sudden action in legislation on such a matter as this seldom brings about a permanent result. On the contrary, it is the reforms gradually imposed upon a people that retain permanency.

After long, calm and careful deliberation, on the part of the authorities, the conservative opinion was reached that little good—and, indeed, much injury, rather than even a temporary improvement—would result from any course pursued, except one involving slowly acting principles favoring gradual prohibition.

Japan believes it possible to bring about the desired result—finally to eliminate both the use and the abuse of opium in her new possession.

In 1900, the Japanese Government, after mature consideration, set about to put into practical operation the forces which had commended themselves as likely to be effective, and accordingly establish a so-called gradual prohibition which involved certain regulations, some of the objects of which were, first, to place the opium commodity under Governmental monopoly; second, to prohibit non-smokers from acquiring the habit; third, to require the registration of all habitual smokers, who thereafter would be allowed to purchase the drug only upon presentation of a license, this in turn being shielded by legislative rule; fourth, to encourage smokers to abandon the habit; and, finally, to impress upon non-smokers the baneful influences on morals and on all progress which so surely follow in the wake of the habit.

In the brief period of seven years the Japanese Government has been gratified to find, through well and carefully compiled statistics, the signal success its initial crusade has met. The result certainly transcends the most sanguine expectation as to the efficacy of the methods introduced.

In 1900, Formosa had a population of 2,840,873, of whom 165,752 were licensed opium-smokers. In 1907, with a population of 3,193,708, there were but 127,477 licensed smokers. The decrease was gradual year by year, with the exception of a slight increase in 1902 and in 1907, due to a shifting of the population and to a reregistering and the compulsory registration of some habitual smokers who had evaded this requirement of the law.

Early in 1908, still more carefully compiled statistics showed that nearly 10,000 incurable smokers were registered, which (since their indulgence long antedates the year 1900, when the so-called gradual prohibitory measures were introduced, and preceded the compilation of the first statistical report which should have included them) brings the gradual decrease in the number of opium-smokers in Formosa to a point that is indeed very gratifying.

At such a wholesome rate of decrease, it is hoped, and it may fairly be expected, that within twenty years this new insular possession of Japan will be destitute of opium-smokers.

Such encouraging facts as the statistics present strongly confirm the wisdom of adopting a policy of gradual prohibition instead of an absolute and an acute withdrawal, so long as the control thereof rests with an effective administration.

Inconsistent as it may at first appear, the consumption of opium in Formosa is on the increase, the amount reaching as much as some 58,333 pounds. The reason, however, is evident when it is understood that, as the age of an habitual opium-smoker advances, so does the amount of the drug he consumes. The ratio of the age in such cases to the quantity consumed is approximately as one to three.

It is thus seen how the increased quantity consumed by the aged overbalances that which the normal number of new converts to its use would require were there any new converts being added. In other words, were it not for the effect of the prohibitory law now in force, the consumption would be the quantity now consumed *plus* that used by the new smokers.

The entire opium trade of Formosa is under the absolute control of the Japanese Monopoly Bureau. The Bureau's income from this commodity alone is gradually increasing, the amount in 1902 being some 3,000,000 yen (\$1,500,000) and in the past year 4,300,000 yen (\$2,150,000).

One-half of the revenue of the Formosan Government is the income of the Monopoly Bureau, and the revenue on opium forms one-third of the whole income.

From these facts it is frequently alleged that Japan has a mercenary motive for not making her prohibition of opium in Formosa immediate and absolute; that she deplors the loss of the revenue therefrom which would be placed annually in her coffers. A clearer knowledge of the real facts, it is hoped, will soon satisfy the mind of any but the superficial or the biased that this is quite erroneous. The truth is that the Bureau of Monopoly has been expending annually no less than 3,000,000 yen (\$1,500,000), and last year appropriated more than this amount for the purchase of the drug alone. To this sum must be added the expense of its manufacture and refining (since opium cannot be used in its crude state), and other processes of preparation for the market. Further, the cost of registering the consumers, and of the maintenance of a special police service which is indispensable must be taken into account. The recapitulation of these outlays leaves but a comparatively slender margin as the net profit, the amount for 1907 not exceeding 100,000 yen (\$50,000), an amount too meagre to influence the state.

The much-mourned civil administrator of the island, the late Hon. Tatsumi Iwai, once publicly stated that the Formosan Government had an annual surplus of from 3,000,000 yen to 4,000,000 yen (\$1,500,000 to \$2,000,000), and that she would gladly surrender the small income from her opium trade in Formosa even were the profits double what they were. In this statement he voiced the sentiment of every conservative man in the administration.

It is not prohibition in itself that Japan objects to, for, indeed, she longs for the day when opium will have held its last séance in her possessions; but sudden and absolute prohibition she gravely deplors, because only too well does she comprehend that such a policy would frustrate the very result she is laboring

to bring about. To withdraw immediately and absolutely from the victim of the opium habit so potent a factor in his existence would be near akin to the impossible, and quite within the bounds of cruelty, if not criminal.

As statistics indicate, there are to-day 127,000 opium-smokers in Formosa, and nearly, if not quite, all are among the very aged who have been used to its effects for many years. It is very seldom that new converts to its use are found since the introduction of the crusade.

Not what to do but how to do it is the question that confronts those who would forever eliminate the obnoxious and the hurtful from Formosa. The present need is rigidly to enforce registration, and to keep established a license system for those addicted to the use of opium, thereby confining its use to those who could not subsist without it. For the present generation and those oncoming, the superior advantages for the development of a higher civilization that are everywhere being gradually introduced, aided by such precautions as the so-called gradual prohibition project involves, offer every assurance, based upon definite facts, that ere long the wretched habit of the abuse of opium in the Island of Formosa will be a forgotten tradition.

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